

## **Realizing Your Dreams Together: Create Partnership Projects!**

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Czeslaw Milosz (1983) said, “To undertake a project, as the word’s derivation indicates, means to cast an idea out ahead of itself so that it gains autonomy and is fulfilled not only by the originator, but, indeed, independently of him as well.” Couples that take on projects together, learn what it takes to be partners in life together and fulfill on what they want for their lives.

“Partnership projects” are distinct from the normal daily routine of life as they are specifically designed by the couple to bring forth some desired future into existence. Within a partnership project, a couple learns to cooperate in planning, in taking coordinated action and in taking stock of what they accomplish along the way. Partnership projects can be created in any area of life, such as home improvement, financial well-being, children/family, career, education, community, vacations and travel. Projects are designed to be time limited and have a specific measurable result.

When creating projects that call for partnership and teamwork toward some desired end, couples will find that there are several steps needed in designing a successful partnership project. The couple will also discover that, throughout the life of their project(s), they must meet periodically so they can continually assess the results of their actions, plan the next steps in their project and be in alignment with each other on a regular basis. What follows are suggested steps to use in creating a partnership project.

### **Create the Future Accomplishment of the Partnership Project**

To create a project with your partner, design the accomplishment of the project by writing it down in the following way “Our project is to have (an accomplishment) by (specific time).” It is important that the statement is as specific as possible. For example, in 2004, my wife, Martha, and I created a partnership project we called “Getting Hitched.” Our project was to have our daughter and her fiancé married in a beautiful loving ceremony in July of 2005, with 150 people in attendance.” At that time, we were living in Amsterdam and we had created another project, called “Seeing the Sights.” That project was to have traveled to ten major cities in Europe by the spring of 2006. The accomplishment of each of our projects was stated as an expression of the future that we were co-creating together. By stating the partnership projects in this way, we experienced ourselves being aligned on what we were building for the future.

## **Identify Current Perspectives and Concerns that Frame the Project**

The next step in designing a project is to identify any disempowering individual or shared perspectives or concerns that might unwittingly shape your relationship to the project you are creating. Such unwitting perspectives might be: “This project is going to be a lot of work and be hard to accomplish,” “This project will take a lot of our free time,” “This project is going to put a lot of stress on our family,” “We are afraid we won’t communicate well,” “The costs of the project will get out of control,” “We are going to get in over our heads.” By identifying such current perspectives, concerns, worries, perceived barriers or anticipated obstacles, you can be responsible for what is unexpressed in the background of your relationship and then be able to shift your current view or framework to something that empowers you. The next step for you both is to create an empowering perspective or context for your partnership project in which every concern or obstacle can then be viewed, explored and resolved within a shared empowering perspective.

## **Create a Powerful Way of Being for your Partnership Project**

The next step of designing a partnership project is to brainstorm a number of different perspectives that could frame the project powerfully. A brainstorming tool that you can use with your partner is the Partnership Umbrella Exercise described below:

1. Together, imagine creating an octagon (8-sided figure with 8 pie slices inside of it) on the floor in front of you. It appears as the top of an umbrella. Together, stand in one of the frames of the umbrella. That frame will be your initial “current perspective” of your project’s future accomplishment (its intended outcome and by when). First identify, the current perspective(s) that you have about the project. For example, “This project is daunting and we are afraid we will never get it done.” What is it like for you as you stand in your current perspective? What do you each experience there? What do you feel? How do you see the project going? How successful do you think you will be? Be aware of your current perspective(s) and concerns and their impact on your project and your lives. Give your current shared perspective(s) a name. For instance, using the example above, you could call it the “The Daunting Perspective.”
2. Move physically (step together into) to another frame of the umbrella that could represent another perspective from which to view your project. Invent another viewpoint from which you both can view your project. For example, “It is challenging, however, we have what it takes to accomplish this project.” Look from the prism of this new perspective and share with each other how the project looks to you now. What is it like for you both in this new perspective? What do you experience? Become aware of the impact this new perspective has on your project and then, name this new perspective. This new perspective could be the “Overcoming Challenges Perspective.”

3. Invent six to eight new perspectives from which to view your project. Examples could be: “We are an awesome partnership, accomplishing this project with courage and boldness,” “This project is just plain fun and an opportunity to play together in life,” “We are champions, masters of the universe, and able to take this project on with ease and grace,” “We are doubting Thomas’ who will get the project done in spite of ourselves.” Every perspective is a valid way of viewing your project and can teach you both something about yourselves in the process of examination. Create both positive and negative perspectives from which to view the accomplishment of the project. The point is to play together and experiment with different viewpoints. Step into each of them and experience what it is like for you to be inside of that new perspective. Notice what perspectives light you up or inspire you and which ones tire you out or frustrate you. Name each perspective as you proceed.
4. After you have examined six to eight perspectives in this way, each of you choose one of the perspectives that empowers you and that you are willing to take on in your project. Stand in that chosen perspective and look at what it is like for you both. What are you experiencing in your newly chosen perspective? Note: If you each choose a different perspective, have that be OK. Simply put the two perspectives together and imagine marrying them into a new joint perspective (e.g., “We are awesome partners, accomplishing this project with courage and boldness and ease and grace!”). Finally, name this joint perspective. It could be “The Graceful Courage Perspective.”
5. Stand in this new perspective you have both chosen and make two lists: “What are you jointly saying “yes” to?” “What are you jointly saying “no” to?” This is an inquiry that focuses directly on what you as a couple are committing yourselves to. It is a powerful way of being in alignment with what you are standing for together in life.
6. Look at how committed you are to your new chosen perspective and to the commitments you have just made. Ask yourselves: “On a scale of 1 -10, how committed are we to our new perspective?” If either of you judge your commitment as less than 10, ask yourselves, “What will it take to have our commitment reach a level of 10?” If you both are committed to a 10, you can challenge yourselves at another level: “What would it take to make our commitment a 15?”
7. When you both experience being at a 10 with your commitment to your new perspective, make that commitment real by stepping over an imaginary line drawn on the floor in front of you. This line distinguishes your current perspective or reality (the one you started with) from the one you are stepping into (your new chosen perspective). Commit to your new perspective by physically stepping over the line and symbolically into the new view you have chosen. You can say

as you step, “We are committed to embracing this new perspective (state the new perspective) in our project at all times.”

8. Design all aspects of your partnership project (outlined in the next section) inside of this co-created and empowering new chosen perspective.

### **Create the Actions and the Interim Accomplishments**

At this point in the project design, the couple stands together in their empowering perspective for the project, are clear about what they are saying “yes” and “no” to and can imagine the accomplishment of their project. The couple then looks from the future accomplishment of the project to the present time. Starting with the future accomplishment working toward the present time, brainstorm all of the interim accomplishments that will occur during your project and all of the actions that you will take inside of the project. As you do this, put the identified actions and accomplishments in a timeline from the future fulfillment of the project to the present time.

One project timeline format that you could be useful to you is to have two columns: Date and Actions/Accomplishments. In the timeline, working from the present to the future accomplishment of the project, list, in sequence, the specific dates by which you plan to have the specific actions and accomplishments completed. With your partner, however, you can invent and use whatever project format works for you.

### **Name the Partnership Project**

Next name the project. It is important that you align on a name and that the name expresses the project in a creative and self-expressed way. The name can call forth the perspective of the project, your values and your vision or the future accomplishment of your project. The name of the project can powerfully call the future into existence.

### **Schedule Project Meetings**

Once you design the partnership project, make a plan to meet on a regular basis and set the length of your project meetings. In the beginning, it is often wise to meet frequently, say once per week for an hour and a half or so, and then meet less frequently or as needed as the project progresses. Look at what works for you as you engage in your partnership project(s).

In every project meeting, start with creating an agenda. It is in these project meetings where you can evaluate what you are accomplishing, re-commit to your commitment and get into action to fulfill your future. Here is a recommended agenda for project meetings:

- What is our agenda? Co-create the agenda for the project meeting before getting involved in the meeting content itself.
- What do we need to “let go of” to be in this project meeting? Simply communicate anything that you each need to say so you can be fully present with each other.
- Who are we as a partnership? Here you can share what is important to you or express your vision. This allows you both to get powerfully related as partners as you begin to review the status of their project.
- What are we creating in this partnership project? Briefly review the future accomplishment of your project.
- What have we accomplished? Each of you share what you see has been accomplished since your last project meeting.
- What is our current perspective of this project? Another question that could be asked is: “Who have we been being in the project?” Share anything you each see that is a disempowering perspective, concern, or obstacle to fulfilling the project.
- What is the empowering perspective that we created for this project? Also, you can ask yourselves: “Who do we now declare ourselves to be with regard to this project?”
- What are the short-term actions and accomplishments that we need to take or focus on? Work with the project timeline, revising the timeframe, editing the actions and accomplishments and re-aligning aspects of the plan. Discuss who will do what and by when and how you plan to be in communication with each other along the way.
- What do we acknowledge ourselves for? What do I (we) appreciate? Takes a few minutes to say anything to acknowledge your partnership or to appreciate each other’s commitment, effort and/or actions related to fulfilling the project.
- When will we meet again? Schedule another project meeting in your calendars.

As you get into action after you have completed your initial project design, you will find that initially there is much to be done. Taking one step at a time without expecting big results right away will keep you from losing enthusiasm for what you are accomplishing. A lot of the early work requires focused action and being in regular communication about what you are doing. These early actions are laying the foundation for the project’s ultimate success. Partnership projects can become the playground for your partnership. Partnership projects can be an expression of your core values and of your vision of your partnership in the world. Dream big and then create a partnership project!

### **References**

Czeslaw, M. (1983). *Visions of San Francisco Bay*. New York: Farrar Straus Giroux